INTRODUCTION

The Kids Involvement and Diversity Study (KIDS) examines the role of out-of-school activities on youth social development and the effects it has on the youth’s future success in the United States. This study examines how out-of-school activities can both promote positive youth outcomes, as well as reinforce social inequalities. Previous research suggests that youth programs’ design, purpose, and treatment differ for different youth.

Youth of color, low-income youth and urban youth are more likely to encounter programs based in a social problem or prevention model, while suburban youth participate in programs that promote their development. One of the gaps in the KIDS project is that it has not yet analyzed how the language of youth programs’ mission statements differ in the Twin Cities urban and suburban areas.

It is important to examine these local agencies’ mission statements because they are reflective of how the programs perceive the youth they are serving and the message they send youth about how society views them.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• Do mission statements of youth programs vary between urban and suburban environments?
• What do the mission statements in urban and suburban programs tell youth about how they are labeled by society?

HYPOTHESIS

The mission statements of urban programs will not positively characterize youth, but will in fact negatively label them.

METHODS

• Analyzed 6 different Twin Cities communities and their youth programs
• Communities Observed
  • Urban: Minneapolis and Saint Paul
  • Inner-Ring Suburban: Brooklyn Park and Maplewood
  • Suburban: Minnetonka and Edina
• Demographic data derived from the United States Census Factbook
• Variables: race, poverty, children, school enrollment, income, free reduced lunch, and income
• Qualitatively analyzed mission statements in various youth programs

COMMUNITY CONTEXTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Minneapolis (Urban)</th>
<th>Saint Paul (Urban)</th>
<th>Edina (Suburban)</th>
<th>Minnetonka (Inner-Ring Suburban)</th>
<th>Brooklyn Park (Inner-Ring Suburban)</th>
<th>Maplewood (Inner-Ring Suburban)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>399,950</td>
<td>295,043</td>
<td>49,373</td>
<td>51,249</td>
<td>52,149</td>
<td>76,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty (family)</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>White:64.2% Black:18.3% Asian:9% Other:18.5%</td>
<td>White:59.6% Black:15.5% Asian:16.5% Other:8.4%</td>
<td>White:86.3% Black:2% Asian:7.1% Other:4.8%</td>
<td>White:68.1% Black:4% Asian:4.1% Other:8.3%</td>
<td>White:62.2% Black:25.6% Asian:15.3% Other:5.6%</td>
<td>White:71.8% Black:8.8% Asian:14.2% Other:5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced lunch</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Income</td>
<td>$57,185</td>
<td>$67,612</td>
<td>$147,247</td>
<td>$115,231</td>
<td>$76,139</td>
<td>$66,674</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS

Examples of OPPRESSIVE Language in mission statements

- Within our walls
- Supervised
- Reduce
- Juvenile Crime
- Develop habits and attitudes
- Intervene
- Restore
- Protect
- At-risk

Examples of DEVELOPMENTAL Language in mission statements

- To Promote
- To Develop
- Nurture
- Encourage
- Build Character
- Skill Improvement
- Sportsmanship
- Fun
- Self-Esteem

Examples of OPPRESSIVE MISSION STATEMENTS

- “Youth involved in the after-school programs will have opportunities to develop healthy protective attitudes.” (Maplewood)

Examples of DEVELOPMENTAL MISSION STATEMENTS

- “To promote the development of healthy lifestyles.” (Maplewood)

KEY FINDINGS

- The language that youth programs use can be categorized into two different themes: oppressive and developmental.
- Oppressive language (e.g. “deviant” and “at-risk”) imposes negative labels to youth that are perceived as dangerous to the wider society.
- Developmental language (e.g. “building self-esteem” and “opportunity to grow”) imposes positive labels to youth who are perceived as potential rising stars.
- The programs are reinforcing social inequalities through the language and communication on their social media.
- Negative language and labels are used in areas that are densely populated with people of color and individuals that have low socio-economic status (SES).

DISCUSSION

Oppressive and developmental language can reflect or reinforce stereotypes on youth in certain communities. The research hypothesizes that urban communities’ mission statements were the only ones that negatively label youth. However, data showed that negative labels placed on youth are seen in areas that are densely populated with people of color and low income families, regardless if they are urban or suburban. Society stereotypes youth from areas that are predominately people of color and low SES as risky to others.

This research shows youth programs in the Twin Cities reinforce these labels and stigmas. The findings are important to show the power of labeling and how pervasive labels are in the lives of youth. Although youth may view themselves as positive, they are constantly bombarded with negative labels by institutions (e.g. school, media, and the criminal justice system). This data shows negative labels persist in out-of-school activities.

Youth may internalize the negative labels and believe that they, and youth like them, are a problem to society; thus leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Some say actions speak louder than words, but this research supports that language and labels can speak louder.

LIMITATIONS

- This is the initial part of a larger study, the key findings cannot be generalized to all urban and suburban areas.
- Due to time restrictions, the study was not able to obtain a larger sample size.
- Could not conduct one-on-one interviews with youth in programs.
- There was not enough evidence to show the correlation between language and the effects it can have on youth.

IMPLICATIONS

- Advocate to increase federal funds for out-of-school activities, in order to positively enhance youth development.
- Reform mission statements that can label youth in a negative manner.
- Expand the research areas to state level and possibly the nation.
- Focus on populations that have higher proportions of minority demographics and families of lower SES.

COMMUNITY CONTEXTS

- Minneapolis (Urban): 399,950
- Saint Paul (Urban): 295,043
- Edina (Suburban): 49,373
- Minnetonka (Inner-Ring Suburban): 51,249
- Brooklyn Park (Inner-Ring Suburban): 52,149
- Maplewood (Inner-Ring Suburban): 76,195